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New York Art Notes

By E. W. POWELL
(Special Correspondent)

THE most stimulating art event in New York during the month of October has been the photographic exhibition held by the American Institute of Graphic Arts, at 119 East 19th Street.

From this show the visitor departs, sensing a basic similarity of outlook between the School of Artistic Photography and what is called the "School of Modern Art." Not that there is anything cubistic or futuristic in the show, and not that "modern art" does not originate in contempt for photographic methods in paint and stone, but that the artistic photographer and the "modern artist" alike insist upon "an innocent eye" and good organization. These modern threadbare terms

imply, first, a naked mind's eye, not clothed in preconceived ideas, but trying to discern the object—and life, too, for that matter—as it is in itself; second, a selective, a constructive, or a decorative sense, signifying above all a feeling for composition. Art from any other standpoint is like the gift without the giver, or rather that art without the heart of the artist is not only dead, but never existed. These fundamental valuations explain the success of one of the best and most widely known photographers, and his scent for what is likely to be meritorious in one way or another in the most "modern" of "modern arts." None of his work is shown in this exhibition, because he could not be present to personally

see to the hanging thereof. This brings to mind the fastidious care as to wall coverings, divisions and picture balancings throughout the show.

There is this essential difference between artistic photography and "modern art." Artistic photography thus far accepts the limitations of literal objectivity, and the result seems unaffected and is intelligible to all. In fact, in this exhibition there is a marked tendency to make the most of literal objectivity—to cherish and proclaim its beauty for there is notably little retouching, which would have been a superfluous marring of what is already pure, an attempt to improve perfection. Baron de Meyer's much-reproduced water lilies in a transparent dish is an example of seized actuality that one remembers at once in this connection—as is also his black boy by a marble fountain. Here is no manipulation, yet here is the highest art, delightful arrangements, interesting throughout in tone, lighting, mass and line, and as expressive of personality as the most abstract of paintings.

"Modern art" has been nauseated by photography in art, (not art in photography), by the mere copying of objectivity to such an extent that it has not yet regained a commonplace appetite; in fact, can see no reason why it should, when it prefers an emancipated one delighted by strange and grown-up dishes for which others have no liking. And is it not right? This is supposed to be a free age. At times, and more often than not, "modern" artists feel the desirability of a preponderance of old-fashioned substantial food in the form of objective literalness, but they ever assert the necessity of something eclectic on the menu. There is no denying that some of the new dishes thus far have been so bizarre that the taste which invented them seemed perverted and ridiculous, as well as acquired. Yet there is no predicting what compromise may and probably will be made when the "modern" appetite becomes healthy and the rest of the world accepts the reminder that art, like conduct and fraternity, is and always has been an expression of life, and a means of development, and that the phase of art having to do with vision must satisfy the lust of the

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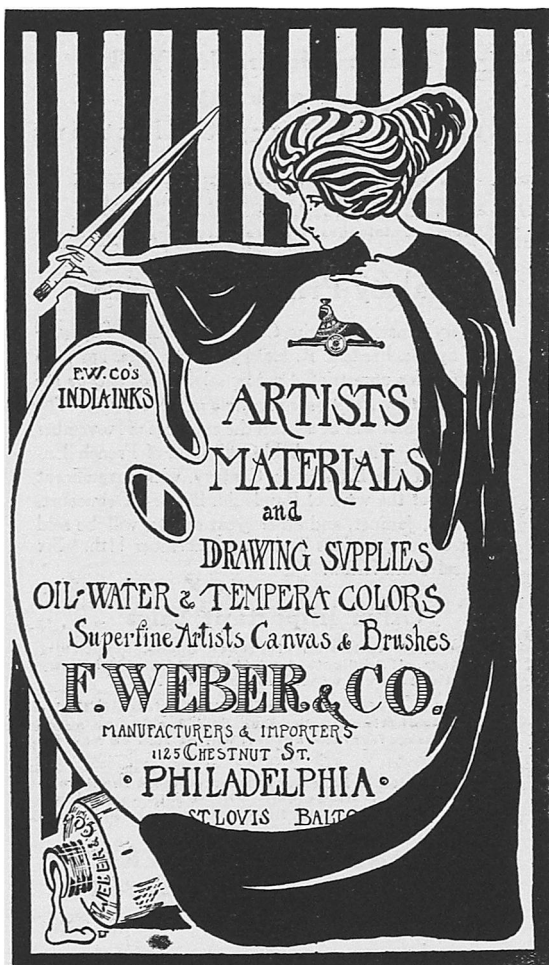
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eye. Art in fine is a matter of individual experience and of science however arrived at, whether intuitively or not.

Another difference between art and photography is the conspicuous experimentation with color among the "moderns" and the conspicuous absence of color in expressive photography thus far—except such color feeling as is afforded in black and white. Color photography has been perfected and there are various exhibits by important photographers who have been experimenting with it in a technical way. Color in photography, however, is an asset which is a handicap and black and white is a limitation that is a benefit, leaving the operator free to concentrate on composition and lighting.

The aims of the group of photographers exhibiting (many of whom are not profes-



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sionals) find a voice in a unique little magazine, started three years ago, at his own expense, by its editor, Edward R. Dickson, as an avenue for self-expression. "Platinum Print" it is called. It is devoted to photography as an art and often contains poetry of the highest distinction.

"Photography," one reads, "as an expressive medium, beautifies the commonplace under beautiful conditions of light. We take the commonplace and decorate the rectangle of our picture, translating what may appear crude to the naked eye, into the expression of poetry."

The rectangle showing the pattern of sunlight under an "E" is an illustration of Mr. Dickson's poetic translating of the commonplace, focussing attention on an everyday perspective liable to be unheeded. How modern in its blocked design and in the lowliness of the subject, and yet how jealously accepted is its literal objectivity.

In the exhibition there are other views of New York, continually surprising the visitor who finds one locality after another in an auspicious light, different or more interesting than he can remember.

Though drawing more from New York than elsewhere, the exhibitors live in many sections of the country, those from Chicago being Robert Conklin and Eugene Hutchinson, and from Evanston there being Gertrude Brown.

The photograph of a woman, a crystal in her hands and her children beside her, in the twilight of what seems a mystical region, gives an excellent idea of the refined and subtle art of Clarence H. White, who is unsurpassed as a photographer of the nude in the open and who is a maker of photographers as well as photographs. A commercial group of his, showing the director of a bank, demonstrates what can be done with a difficult problem by an ingenious artist and one who knows his school of Dutch portraits.

One of the best known photographers in the world is Alvin I. Langdon Coburn, a Yankee of London, and a student and friend of Mr. White's, as is also Mr. Dickson. It should be mentioned that Mr. Coburn is represented in the show by a number of prints in the pos-

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session of Mr. White, two of which are views of the Grand Canyon and, it is said, no other photographs taken in this region approach Mr. Coburn's in the impression of immensity.

Gum prints, of course, are in evidence, and, as everyone knows, they can be manipulated so that it is possible to mistake them for sketches in pencil or wash; or to give any atmosphere or texture. "Mother and Child," a gum print by Gertrude Kasbier, which is reproduced in the drawing books of Chicago, is included in the group of her work. The prints by Dr. A. F. Chaffee and Maud Langtree are remembered for their atmospheric effects.

In addition to examples of the finest work yet produced in photography the display organized by the Institute of Graphic Arts includes exhibits to demonstrate the development of photography from the days of Euclid, who used the *camera obscura*, up to the taking of "movies." Da Vinci was the first to write a complete description of the camera

obscura and it was first used in photography by Thomas Wedgwood, whose experiments were published in 1802 after his death.

It was not until 1839, however, that photography as now practiced was discovered.

One particularly interesting case containing Civil War photographs shows the earliest known portrait of Lincoln, when a gaunt, serious, humorous young man in 1848. One by Walker and another by Gardner, taken in 1865, show him wan and harassed, weighed down by the nation's travail, a face bearing the mark of doom as it seems in the light of subsequent events.

Bust of President Wilson, by Jo Davidson, at the Reinhardt Galleries.

At the Reinhardt Galleries a new portrait bust of another President of the United States in a crucial period would seem also to tell of sleepless nights. This is a new Wilson from the hand of Jo Davidson, a young American sculptor who, before the war, lived abroad

most of the time; a Wilson different from the one seen in the photographs at every turn, more markedly intellectual, saddened and aged. The modelling is minutely realistic—as for future generations. The faithful subtleties are conspicuous in the sensitive nose and the assymetrical chin. The mouth makes the profiles viewed from the two sides seem to belong to different men.

A Memorial Exhibition of Howard G. Cushing's Work at the Knoedler Galleries.

At the Knoedler Galleries there has been an impressive memorial exhibition, lent for the most part, of the work of Howard G. Cushing. This collection deeply augments the realization that he was above all the most precious of decorators recently in our midst; a painter who loved the exquisite and who turned more and more to pure decoration. His last work, which is unfinished, is the decorating for George Blumenthal, of a swimming pool, having for motifs such sea creatures and sea growths with their exotic colorations as recall a vast aquarium. It is impossible to imagine these panels more beautiful in every detail. The same is true of his studies of Oriental art objects and flowers, though they are not so poetic; in fact, they are not exactly poetic at all. Indeed, his over-door panels are meticulously elaborated and have the added piquancy of conventionalization, one set suggesting humorous della Robbias, and the other, Pompeian in color, making use of the Renaissance festoon in a unique manner. There are also Chinese decorations, most peculiarly Occidental, however,

painted for William Straight and the three panels of an almond-eyed, life-size Aphrodite on the waves from Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney's swimming pool.

Besides these and other unadulterated decorations, there are a number of portraits and several landscapes, especially various Mrs. Cushings, that have been conspicuous in exhibitions all over the country for some years, and in which there is a certain glamour found in none of the other portraits. Several intimate interiors, showing his wife, easily recognizable, and a fluffy-haired child, seem almost sacred arrangements with a caress in every stroke. One portrait of Mrs. Cushing is closely associated with two other paintings: one representing the same subject, the same pose, the same violet cloak and the same black and white floor, but a plain wall, and the other being the panel, cooler in actual key, which supplants the plain wall.

The cumulative effect of this exhibition is the feeling of the presence of a rarely sensitive and fastidious personality and something of the peace of a deserted temple. Here is no straining to be abstract. Here is no doubt that the message to be delivered is joy in delicate, rare, objective beauty and its inalienable spiritual suggestion.

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